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OFFICE OF NAVAL INTELLIGENCE

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DATE OF REPORT

1 Jul 1953

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BRIEF (FOR REPORTS OF MORE THAN ONE PAGE, ENTER CAREFUL SUMMARY)

Nick KONKIN and Paul Karl POPOFF were tried in the Nelson Assize Court for arson. POPOFF's conviction and sentence was the cause of sixteen home burnings. Attorney-General Bonner sent an appeal to Justice Minister Carson. John LEBEDOFF is reported collecting money for relocation, and is blamed for most of the recent violence. Young Sons of Freedom "Christian Reform" group temporarily left the Kootenays for the Okanagan Valley. Stefan SROKIN sent a letter from Uruguay declaring his mission almost complete. The Soviets will go ahead with their 8-point program. John J. VERIGIN was married to Laura RELKOFF.

Ref: (a) DIO/13ND Restricted ONI 3820-2 Report, Serial 73-53 of 28 May 1953.

Report:

1. The trials of Nick KONKIN and Paul Karl POPOFF, Sons of Freedom arsonists, have led to a significant chain of events in the Kootenay country of British Columbia. POPOFF was convicted and sentenced to fourteen years in prison as a result of his trial in the Nelson, B.C. Assize Court, and POPOFF was found guilty of burning the \$45,000 Goloff planer mill, the Brilliant Community Hall, and a \$4200 home belonging to John BLOODOFF. Nick KONKIN, tried for the same offenses, was acquitted because of the Crown's lack of evidence. These trials represented the first major trials since mass Freedonite arrests took place in 1951 for burnings and nude parades.
2. During the weekend of 13-14 June, sixteen fires broke out in protest to POPOFF's conviction and sentence. The RCMP pointed out that all fires occurred within a half-hour period, indicating a widespread arson attack. Homes at Perry Siding, Appledale, Winlaw, Goose Creek and Krestova, and a small school on Goose Creek were destroyed.
3. Attorney-General Bonner's first reaction to the multiple Freedonite fires was to give it a minimum of attention. Bonner discounted the possibility of calling out the militia, declaring the situation "a matter of police investigation - no extraordinary steps needed". Bonner further criticized the abundance of Freedonite publicity by a statement in which he said, "I feel that recent installment articles tending to dramatize the roles of the Sons of Freedom perhaps encourage this sort of protest against civil authority. The sort of mentality that will protest by arson will be encouraged by publicity of this sort".

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4. A few days later, however, Banner expressed his true exasperation with the 13-14 June burnings in a wire to Justice Minister Garson,

"Recent incidents of arson in Kootenays illustrate shocking nature of problem posed by Sons of Freedom sect. While provincial responsibility for law and order is being fully discharged, it must be recognized that Sons of Freedom pose no normal police problem, in that unknown elements of that community use dynamite and arson as means of collective protest while receiving protection of citizenship status.

"It is not fair that non-Doukhobor communities, business and a trans-continental railway should be intermittently endangered for want of legislation to provide the legal machinery to deal with this question.

"Strongly urge reconsideration of refusal to confer in Victoria on previous proposals of this government."

5. John LEBEDOFF is still actively aggressive in his contention for Freedomite leadership. During the trial of Karl POPOFF, it was brought out by an unnamed, prominent Freedomite that most of the fires are the work of a small group of fanatic Sons, as a part of the leadership struggle in the community.

6. In a meeting with eight executive members of the Slocan Valley Citizen's Committee on 16 June, representatives of the Reformed Sons of Freedom also blamed LEBEDOFF for recent troubles, such as the burnings at Gilpin, which destroyed a home, two woodsheds and a bath-house, and for arousing participation in the 13-14 June burnings. The Reformed Sons reported that LEBEDOFF is collecting money from the Sons of Freedom for relocation.

7. LEBEDOFF's following is found only among the group of approximately 2500 Sons of Freedom Doukhobors, where it is believed only a small percentage of the most fanatic Freedomites adhere to LEBEDOFF. The Freedomites at Krestova voted on 24 May to denounce LEBEDOFF and the Consultative Committee on Doukhobor Affairs. Freedomites in the Gilpin area made the same decision a couple of weeks later. Both groups have reaffirmed their desire to follow SOROKIN.

8. An un-reported number of young Sons of Freedom Doukhobors, members of the newly formed "Christian Reform" group, recently left their Kootenay homes for the Okanagan Valley where they obtained part-time employment in the fruit industry. They expect to remain until the Fall harvest, but according to an elder Freedomite, many may never return to the Kootenays.

9. A letter was received from the absent Stefan S. SOROKIN, who still resides in Uruguay. His letter, which was read to the Slocan Valley Citizen's Committee on 9 June, said in part,

"The delay here in Uruguay in obtaining permission for the entry of 700 Doukhobor families is, by South American standards, quite in order. Nobody here hurries. My mission here, with the exception of a few minor details, is almost completed, and I expect to return a document to that effect any day."

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SCHROKIN reportedly wrote that the government of Uruguay had already advised its consulate in Ottawa of the move under the same regulations governing any immigrants.

10. The Social Credit government in B.C. plans to go ahead with their 8-point program as outlined in reference (a). The government sale of Doukhobor lands will begin in July as planned.

11. The most recent development is the wedding of John J. VERIGIN, great-grandson of Peter (the Lordly) Verigin, and Secretary of British Columbia's 10,000 Orthodox Doukhobors. The bride is Laura RELKOFF of Brilliant. The wedding, the most important Doukhobor marriage in Canada in years, comes on a weekend of major significance to Doukhobors. The Monday following the wedding, 28 June, is Peter's Day, the anniversary of the burning of arms by Doukhobors in Russia in 1895 as a formal notice to the Czar of their pacifism. While thousands of Orthodox members of the Sect celebrated the marriage with songs and feasting, torch-raising radical Sons of Freedom burned ten dwellings.

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PREPARING OFFICER'S COMMENT:

Attorney-General Bonner's apparent unconcern with one of the largest arson attacks in a long time, and his later retaliation with a plea to Stuart Garton, was a clear indication of his worn-out patience in the request for federal government legislative action on Doukhobor affairs.

Bonner's interjection of the endangered transcontinental railroad, which runs through Doukhobor country, was no doubt intended to arouse federal concern. The railroad has not been disturbed for some time.

Such informal requests as the wire Bonner sent to Garton are to no avail, as Bonner has been officially informed. Definite, clearly set-forth recommendations must be presented to the federal government through the proper channels, with no assurance that such proposals would be accepted by the federal government.

The receipt of Sorokin's most recent letter by Reformed Doukhobor members was not accompanied with the usual fanfare. Previous letters from Sorokin have been published in full, in local newspapers, with evidence of his signature clearly visible. There has been no official word that the Uruguayan Consulate in Ottawa has been informed by the government in Uruguay that a relocation move is pending, which seems to offer cause to challenge the authenticity of such a letter. A report from the alleged letter may have been presented to the Slovan Citizen's Committee to pacify the residents of that area.

Members of the Sons of Freedom Sect started fires during the festivities of John Verigin's wedding to draw attention away from the direct descendant of a long line of Orthodox Doukhobor leaders. The Freedmites object to any suggestion of John Verigin leadership. It is not supposed that the date of Verigin's wedding will serve as a rallying point for any form of group demonstrations.

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